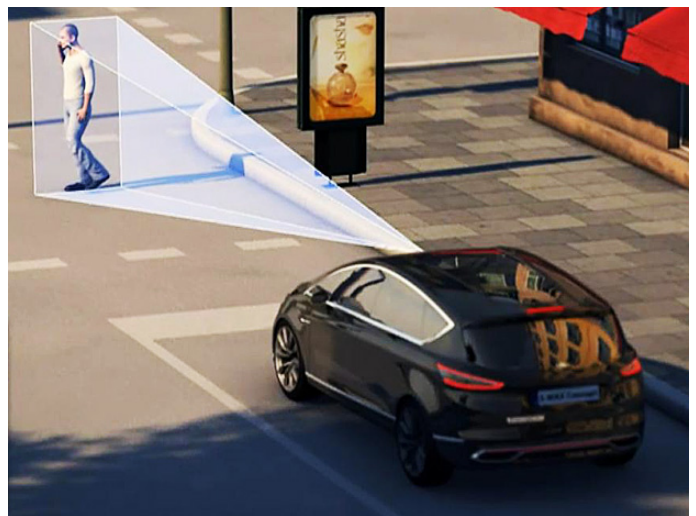


Ford Demos Emergency Autosteering

By Lucas Laursen

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Fall asleep at the wheel of the right prototype car and it will steer you around obstacles. That's what Ford's demonstration (<http://www.autoblog.com/2013/10/09/ford-fully-automated-self-parking-car-video/>) of an obstacle avoidance system at its proving ground near Lommel, Belgium, this week implies. But it won't be ready for a long time. Ford took advantage of the attention its prototype drew to announce its full parking-assistance technology, which is mature enough that it might be in your next car and wins hands-down against the autosteering for clever advertising (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44CiwvhJWyU#action=share>).



Ford

Both obstacle avoidance and the more mundane parking assistance are part of the larger trend toward greater autonomy in road cars, as *IEEE Spectrum* noted (<http://spectrum.ieee.org/tech-talk/green-tech/advanced-cars/the-race-to-get-your-hands-off-the-wheel>) at the Frankfurt Motor Show last month. The technologies exist along a spectrum from the simplicity of 20th-century cruise control to features that take over momentarily from bad drivers to the sort of autonomy that would turn drivers into passengers, able to sleep or read an issue of *Spectrum* without worrying about traffic.

Driver assistance on the market today tends to focus on avoiding impending collisions by detecting obstacles and alerting the driver or even hitting the brakes. Steering around obstacles, such as the Ford demonstrator did in Lommel, is still a nascent technology. "The big jump is now to take over control of the car in the longitudinal and latitudinal directions," says BMW's head of driver assistance and perception Werner Huber. BMW has already introduced dynamic cruise control, which slows the car down as you start to overtake slowpokes. And it's introduced warnings that keep you from drifting out of your lane. Taking over the steering wheel to avoid a crash should be in the next batch of driver assistance packages, Huber says.

Car sensors can now look up to 200 meters ahead and distinguish between routine traffic and obstacles, so writing algorithms clever enough to keep up with them is a major challenge, says Bosch autonomous car chief Michael Fausten. In response, carmakers are joining forces: the demonstration at Ford's test track is actually technology Ford is developing with support from the European Union and in conjunction with other carmakers, including BMW, Fiat, Daimler, Volvo, and Volkswagen, reports the BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-24464480>).

The consortium has tested its obstacle avoidance prototype at up to 60 km/h, which is twice the speed of the automatic braking demonstration I experienced at the Frankfurt Motor Show last month (<http://spectrum.ieee.org/tech-talk/green-tech/advanced-cars/the-race-to-get-your-hands-off-the-wheel>). Still, it's a long way from highway speeds. So for now drivers who are ready to let go of the wheel should probably stick to parking speeds, or at least parking lots.

Photo: Ford